

CRITICAL DIGEST

Vol V No 23

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The Weekly Newsletter Digest of the Current NYC & LA Entertainment Scene

NYC Theatre Openings This Week

Maggie-National 2/18/53. Franklin Gilbert and John Fearnley present musical adaption of James Barrie's play What Every Woman Knows... Book by Hugh Thomas, music and lyrics by William Roy. Cast includes Betty Paul, Keith Andes, Odette Myrtil, and Bramwell Fletcher. Directed by Michael Gordon... Misalliance-City Center 2/18/53. NYC Theatre Company's second limited run production. Shaw play directed by Cyril Ritchard. Featuring Barry Jones, Tamara Geva, Roddy McDowell and Dorothy Sands. Critics to attend Tues preview due to conflict... Picnic -Music Box 2/19/53. Theatre Guild presents a new play by William Inge, directed by Joshua Logan, with Ralph Meeker, Janice Rule and Peggy Conklin.

Digests of Current NYC Theatre Reviews

The Emperor's Clothes-Barrymore 2/9/53. Two rave notices, 2 mild so-so reviews, and majority of con verdicts greeted Gerge Tabori's new play, presented by Robert Whitehead in association with the Playwrights Company. News and Post critics filed the pro notices. The most exciting stage piece seen thus far this season is how Chapman, News, rated it, while Watts, Post, termed it a drama of strength and intelligence that cannot easily be forgotten. Lee J Cobb, Maureen Stapleton and Brandon de Wilde were all praised highly by these 2 critics, though many thought they turned in poor acting jobs. Coleman, Mirror, found many fine moments in drama of political tyranny in 1930 Hungary, but noted that they came too infrequently. Hawkins, World Telegram & Sun, listed it as the kind of a play that would have a distinguished success outside pitiless commercial glare of Broadway. Plays' survival depends, he pointed out, on just how many people wish to watch a man learn about integrity in terms of this one country. Pro critics agreed that Harold Clurman's contribution as director is very important in tying the scripts loose ends together. Times, Herald Tribune, and Journal American reviewers panned script and performers for presenting a minor situation in an unrealistic manner. Atkinson, Times, thought play, which he termed scribbled, might have improved if it had the forthright style and moral conviction which de Wilde shows in his work. But Kerr, Herald Tribune, thought the young actor played his role stiffer than the stick in Mrs. McThing.

On Borrowed Time- 48th St Theatre 2/10/53. Unanimous pro reviews welcomed Victor Moore in revival of 1930 hit comedy-fantasy by Paul Osborn, presented by Richard Krakeur and Randolph Hale. All reviewers agreed that part seemed tailor made for Moore and that supporting cast headed by David John Stollery, Leo G Carroll and Beulah Bondi were all perfect. They blended in making the on stage doings seem believable. Kerr, Herald Tribune, and Watts, Post, voiced minor objections on slow and uneven pace set by director Marshall Jamison. Kerr also panned Paul Morrison's sets as on a low part with usual stock company jobs, though majority thought it was very homey.

Hazel Flagg- Hellinger 2/11/53. Mild, though unanimous, pro verdict agreed upon by daily critics appraising musical stage adaption of "Nothing Sacred" film. Book by Ben Hecht, music by Jule Styne and lyrics by Bob Hilliard, in production presented by Styne and Anthony Farrell, all played second to technical talents. Thus Robert Alton's dance direction, Harry Horner's scenery, and Miles White's costumes won top notices. Thomas Mitchell, Helen Gallagher, Jack Whiting and Benay Venuta were all credited with turning in competent, though not outstanding, assignments. Many noted dearth of hit songs in workmanlike musical. Kerr, Herald Tribune, noted that Hecht's script had lost much of bite of film play.

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Journal of Current & Future Studies

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Off Broadway Notes

Circle in the Square program of one acters Feb 15-16 includes Auto da Fe, new play by Tennessee Williams, the Trojan Horse, new play by Archibald MacLeish, and Kurt Weill's opera Down in the Valley. The Enchanted presented in a theatre in the round production by Columbia Players at Earl Hall, Broadway and 117th St Feb 18-21...Voice of America recorded portions of Dramatists' Forum reading of Hazel, a new play by Murray and Lewis Spitzer...Hempstead, LI, Theatre may be used as tryout house... Tophatters producing revival of Lawrence Riley comedy Return Engagement Feb 27-28 at Central Auditorium, Brooklyn...Angelic Doctor, Blackfriars production of Brendan Larnen's play, enjoyed by Francis, Billboard, inspite of its minor faults. Though biography of St. Thomas Aquinas tries to cover too many years, plot ties together better than most religious dramas...Equity Community Theatre's season opened at DeWitt Clinton Community Center, Bronx with Ah, Wilderness!, played without scenery. Atkinson, Times, and Rice, Post, journeyed to Bronx to see a thoroughly delightful show. Latter ranks it high on long. line of good Equity Theatre shows.

Vaudeville Notes

6 orchestra seats at every performance of Danny Kaye at Palace have been allotted to Damon Runyon Fund and are available at Hotel Astor office...Paramount bill headed by Joni James praised by Jose, Variety. New record star has basic ability to be a hit for a long time, once she develops a style of her own, trade paper critic predicted. Dave Barry's comedy routines slightly on stale side, but audience loved them, he noted. Jose suggested that Johnny Long's orchestra might have been able to put on a good show if given a longer chance...Second "Ice Colorama" impressed Billboard critic as being uneven and poorly staged spectacle, inspite of the sumptuous costumes and scenery and talent on hand.

Children's Theatre

Children's Own Theatre presenting Sleeping Beauty Sat and Suns at 430 6th Ave... Matinee for Moppets presents Sats at Jan Hus House Peggy Bridge Marionettes, Leroy the Magician, and Barbieri Brothers, sponsored by Ken Parker productions...Playmart Children's Theatre continues Aladdin and Lamp Sat and Suns at Carl Fischer Hall... Junior Theatre presents The Emperor's New Clothes Sat and Suns at Carnegie Recital Hall...Characters Unlimited present Wagon Trail Westward Sats at Brooklyn Academy...Merry G o Rounders present program of Dance Plays for Children Suns at YMHA.

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' Green Room Department '

PICKING DRAMA SCHOOLS... Any adolescent eager to register at a drama school should survey the field carefully first, warns Burr, Playbill. Then he should choose one of proven and unquestioned ability. There are some, though not many, in this exclusive class. The good schools seldom promise very much. They insist, Burr pointed out, that the individual can be helped only in direct ratio to his own ability and sincerity.

CRITICAL THOUGHTS... Budding playwrights should stick to love, murder and prostitution, and avoid specialized topics, suggests Chapman, News, after surveying past history of hits. Critic also concludes that show business is the most favored of inside stories, and that the movies have just about played the subject to death. Actors, critic added, are interesting only as actors, but seem to be great bores as people... Drama reporters in a tizzy over violent Theatre Arts article panning them, reports Winchell... Columnist also reported that most of Broadway knows which critics Jed Harris panned as inept in interview with Morehouse, WT&S.

MAIL BOX... To set the record straight, a number of listeners from Salem, Mass corrected NBC Pearson Critic At Large when he stated in his review of The Crucible that there had been burning of witches in their city. Letters and a phone call from the mayor confirm fact that witches in Salem's history were either hanged or pressed to death with stones, but no burnings.

COLUMN TIPS... Show business district phones believed to be tapped by an investigating committee, whispers Sylvester, News... Fearing that Bette Davis' health will not last too long in Two's Company, the revue's entire dance line showed up for Can-Can tryouts, hears Winchell.

CONSULTANT SERVICE... J M Beasley's "Theatrical Consultant Service" circular continues to fascinate the drama reporters. Sylvester, News, enjoyed item that fees are reasonable, no more than doctor who treats your hay-fever... we have cure for everything but laziness. Drama editor is certain that Beasley should do quite well, the way things are in show business.

INTERVIEW HI-LITES... Full credit for revival of On Borrowed Time given to Victor Moore by author Paul Osborn, Rice, Post, learned... Fifth Season is a combination of Death of a Salesman and Potash and Perlmutter sketches, and might be called Life of a Salesman, suggests director Gregory Ratoff to Hawkins, WT&S.

CURTAIN SPEECH... Victor Moore's curtain speech at end of On Borrowed Time thanked audience for their kind reception of him in his first straight part on Broadway. Actor who confessed he will be 77 on Feb 24, admitted that the lazy life of Hollywood bored him, and that he is only happy when working. Moore considers the Osborn comedy one of the finest ever written. He hopes it will last into the summer, in spite of the state of air conditioning in the NYC theatres.

' Theatre News Roundup '

The Bat closed at National, but hopes to re-open at another house within 2 weeks. The Emperor's Clothes has posted a closing notice for Feb 21... Harold Clurman, director and former drama critic of Nation, named drama critic of New Republic. Joseph Wood Krutch has retired to Arizona... Wish You Were Here Drops Mon early curtain March 9. Josephine suspended in Chicago... Emil Schram elected USO president.

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' Weekly Digests of NYC Plays '

The Crucible- Martin Beck 1/22/53. Interesting set of diverse opinions filed by weekly reviewers on Arthur Miller's new play presented by Kermit Bloomgarden. Kirchwey, Nation editor, can't agree with those critics who found no connection between the witch hunts of 1692 and 1953. To her the play gathers momentum and power with each act. The final scene, she notes, summarizes the theme of the play with an eloquence that carries at least 1 member of audience out of theatre in mood of resolve rather than despair. Beaufort, Christian Science Monitor, found play less satisfactory as dramatic tragedy, though it does draw its parallels with terrifying success. Though there is heart and a sense of concerned agitation, he feared there was not much light or humanity. George Jean Nathan rates play far below Miller's Death of A Salesman, but it still provides him with the encouragement in respect to our theatre that we badly stand in need of. Play, Nathan sums up, while dynamic in intention boils only inside itself and gives off little external steam. Shipley, WEVD New Leader, joins critics who believe that script has no application today, though we do face the same problems of the spirit.

THE Love of Four Colonels-Shubert 1/15/53. Peter Ustinov's new comedy-fantasy, starring Rex Harrison and Lilli Palmer, is either too serious or not serious enough, comments Bentley, New Republic, and he personally leans toward the former view. Stars without question have done first rate jobs in their times, but both somehow manage to play the entire play, pans Bentley, without any trace of style. Taking the other viewpoint, Beaufort, Christian Science Monitor, enjoyed play especially for the field day in acting it provided its 2 stars. George Jean Nathan recommended play only for those who enjoy the superficialitis of the theatre, not those who want a little food to get their teeth into. While Kirchwey, Nation recommended play for anyone who doesn't take it too seriously.

' NYC Nite Clubs '

Carl Brisson at Persian Room of Plaza won rave reviews from Dana, World Telegram & Sun, Trau, Variety, and Smith, Billboard. All praised his charm, fine appearance, and expert use of small bandmike...Anne Jeffreys-Robert Sterling duo at Empire Room of Waldorf Astoria added Jose, Variety, and Smith, Billboard, to their list of admirers. Latter commented that they have looks, class and an imaginative routine set up...Johnnie Ray at the Copacabana almost stumped the critics attempting to describe the goings on. Kahn, Variety, listed affair as the biggest crying jag since Castoria, while Smith, Billboard, summed up the proceedings as little short of mass hysteria. Smith had wished that on opening night Milton Berle and Jan Murray didn't try to get into the act. Supporting bill of Nicholas Brothers' and The Kean Sisters also praised by all saloon editors... Recommended dance bands of week include Sammy Kaye at Statler's Cafe Rouge, okayed by Dana, WT&S, and Jack Pina at the Roosevelt Grill.